

FINDING DEEPER CONNECTIVITY
THROUGH FULL-BODY RESONANT LISTENING
IN JOAN LITTLEWOOD'S *OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR*

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Abstract

This thesis contains research on my artistic challenge to find deeper connectivity through full-body resonant listening as an actor in Joan Littlewood's play *Oh What a Lovely War*. It documents my research on my mind/body artistic practice, Joan Littlewood, Mindfulness, The Great War, Charlie Chaplin, corporal resonance, and the further development of my visceral approach to theatre. Selected journal entries demonstrate the application of my research in rehearsals and performances. They reflect my practices, processes, observations, and applications (successful and unsuccessful) during my research. My anticipated outcome is the attainment of full-body listening and a deeper connection with others and my immediate environment. After a detailed investigation of my artistic challenge in multiple applications, I was able to achieve a state of what I refer to as a porous presence and availability. I believe I was successful in finding deeper attunement and connection when listening with resonant full-body awareness.

Dedication

My deepest gratitude to the village that has made it all possible:

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In honour of my parents, my grandma Frances and my aunt Rae.

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Introduction

I am a physical and lyrical actor with a strong music and dance background. My career of twenty-five years has been filled with musical theatre and made generous use of my height, my corporal humour and my wit. My previous acting training in classical theatre (or what non-musical performers sometimes refer to in the industry as ‘straight theatre’) prepared me well for creating honest relationships onstage.

While my training and talent have afforded me a lengthy and satisfying career, the nature of musicals requires an enormous amount of energy, stamina and the seamless marriage of many disciplines, but does not always employ the tools used in a non-musical production. Tools like deep character exploration, active listening and the embracing of impulse are often sidelined to focus more on musical phrasing, choreographic precision, and technical execution. More often than not the musical rehearsal process does not invest in exploration and organic contribution, but rather speeds toward the end gain of opening night. After many years of hearing dismissive remarks about musical performers from non-musical colleagues, I come to the MFA program at York University to affirm my ‘straight’ acting skills, to validate and revitalize my artistic process, and to articulate the learning of that process to better teach acting students.

The constraints of budgets and lack of time in our present theatre climate in Canada have created a heavy focus on product with waning opportunity for process. Musicals require more time than non-musicals because of the extra elements, like dance, harmonies within sung music and rapidly changing blocking that must come together all at once. I cannot change our cultural climate but I can change the way I approach my

work to bring more of my talents and me to rehearsals and performances. This new approach directly involves the way that I listen.

My artistic challenge is finding a deeper connectivity through full-body resonant listening. I believe that by increasing my awareness in the way I receive and perceive information, I will be able to establish more profound and meaningful connections onstage. In order to facilitate this degree of full corporal engagement I will need to be extremely present and free from excess tension and mental chatter. I will draw from my class experiences at the Haliburton School of the Arts in Expressive Arts Facilitation, where connecting with one's inner intuitive nature is paramount. In addition I will explore the practices of Mindfulness and Alexander Technique, where centering work stems from the gut and heart instead of the brain. Both techniques offer an accessible grounding process that eliminates overthinking and fosters intuitive awareness. By exploring full-body listening and engagement I aim to source and secure a calm and grounded presence that will allow further exploration of the myriad of physical resonators in my body.

As a secondary investigation I want to employ leading from different physical resonators and experience how they influence and change my listening and responding. I anticipate that different body parts will allow me to resonate with other actors and my environment with more individual specificity and I want to establish how to access those resonant connections with efficiency and ease. My wish is to incorporate resonance play into my process of character development, to explore personal connections in rehearsal and to connect more with the spaces we occupy. I hope to assimilate this new approach to

listening into my acting skill set. By embodying my receptiveness to resonance and vibration I believe it will connect me to others with more emotional depth and flexibility.

I will research Joan Littlewood and her Theatre Workshop ensemble, including archival notes, historical significance, and a recording of the film *Oh What a Lovely War*. In addition I want to investigate World War I propaganda, radio broadcasts and the famous Christmas truce of 1914. I have chosen three roles out of my fourteen to explore with greater depth; the suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, the German soldier who sings a German Christmas carol during the famous Christmas truce of 1914, and the Drill Sergeant who speaks gibberish in a heightened comedic style. For the Sergeant I have chosen to research the work of famous writer, producer, actor, and clown Charlie Chaplin, an extremely popular star during the First World War and in my opinion a physical genius.

By actively employing the above-mentioned techniques, I intend to explore the physical ways my characters listen and lead. I intend to develop a more profound connection to my actor's world. I anticipate the fortification of my personal acting process and an expansion and deepening of my actor's toolkit as it applies to musicals and non-musicals alike.

Artistic Challenge Research

In order to explore and convey honest and compelling relationships on the theatrical stage, an actor needs full and immediate access to a rich emotional range. Listening, relating, processing and connecting are some of the key tools I employed when accessing human emotions, behaviours, and relationships. My artistic challenge as an actor is to strengthen and deepen my ability to connect. By engaging in full-body resonant listening I hope to develop a process that enables me to connect with people, energy, sound, emotion, and information on a deeper more resonant level. I am revisiting my own approach to professional rehearsals and performances to find genuine, more meaningful ways of relating. I want to connect more with my intuition and corporal resonance. My research will focus on my exploration of receiving and delivering authentic communication with full-body resonant listening or what could be called 'corporal surround sound'. I propose that by consciously changing the way I listen, I can significantly strengthen my emotional connections and add substantial power and depth to my performances.

I perceive that over the past twenty-five years in professional theatre my listening skills have grown habitual and somewhat casual or disconnected. Certain words, terms, and directions can float past without landing as I unconsciously begin my pattern of script review or character work in an efficient instead of exhaustive manner. Even with a focused conscious effort, rehearsal periods can be counter-productive when up against time restraints. As a result my listening may be resonant and participatory but lack satisfying investigation and connection. I want to break through my existing artistic

practice and establish a new process that can achieve depth even in the face of compressed time.

I recognize that my career in musical theatre has trained my ear to listen, process and engage in the stimulating mix of music, dance, text, and song. I listen well but the critical element of interpretation can drift into autopilot when it must reside within the confines of a musical measure or phrase, either my own or someone else's. Similar to the confines of rehearsal schedules, text and music rehearsals do not usually allow time for exploration of impulse and awareness, or for the opportunity to truthfully connect in the midst of singing and dancing. This structure can cause a lack of spontaneity and sometimes foster disengagement in communication. I want to explore new ways to resolve that habit and rebuild my creative process. I would like to navigate my senses in directions they haven't gone before, not from lack of desire, but more from lack of time as rehearsal periods get shorter and the pressures to produce a finished product quickly override process. My new process needs to become familiar, easily accessible, and very efficient in order to access and implement my full-body resonant listening as quickly and effectively as possible.

I am curious to investigate the various ways I hear and understand information. I want to listen with the auditory mechanisms of my ears, but also as a whole being, through body language, energy fields, verbal language, and social behavior. My research will involve the application of full-body resonant listening to my rehearsals and performances with as much honesty and freedom as possible. I realize that previously I have considered my body the appendage to carry my listening ears unless responding to music. Once music is introduced my body responds immediately and I experience a full

corporal engagement that includes my head and brain. Like farce, musical theatre must exist within the scaffolding of rhythm and tempo. This often means my ears and eyes are tracking other actors or dancers, a director or a conductor, or a combination of the aforementioned and rarely include my relationships, my immediate ambient soundscape or the physical vocabulary of others.

So what exactly is full-body resonant listening? The Oxford English and Merriam Webster dictionaries agree that hearing is a sensory perception while listening requires more thoughtful attention and interpretation. For the purposes of my research I define full-body resonant listening as the ability to resonate 360 degrees within one's immediate environment, and, with full body awareness, to remain receptive and attentive to the messages therein.

Full-body resonant listening is well suited to align itself with the practice of Mindfulness training. Mindfulness helps to not only settle my speeding mind but assists in heightening my full corporal awareness. Mindfulness is practiced through the combination of Mindful consciousness training, yoga and meditation. Psychologist Dr. Scott Barry explains, "Mindfulness helps train a number of executive attention functions, including attentional control, cognitive inhibition, mental flexibility, and emotional regulation. All are crucial for allowing us to maintain focus on the external environment and ignore inner chatter as situations demand." (Kaufman 80) For those who believe in a Greater Power, I personally liken the training most closely to prayer. It harnesses the swirling mind, releases the body's stresses, and focuses on breath. It can only ever be grounding. Jean Vanier, Canadian founder of L'Arche Internationale, wrote in his book *On Becoming Human*, "For most people, prayer necessitates stepping back from the

pains and joys of daily life. We need this stepping back, particularly from all that is difficult or conflict-ridden, taking for ourselves a certain distance, in order to look at things ... ” (Vanier 31)

Actors must possess in their tool kits a handful of exercises or practices that will ground and center the mind and body and attune them to the energy and world of each new play. Once actors find an inner calm they can align their corporal listening with their breath and then begin to connect with the character, circumstance, and emotional state necessary to tell the story. All personal emotions, challenges and obsessive thoughts must allow the way for the theatrical character on the page to surface, live and embodied, and exist fully in the time of the playing. Each actor must establish his or her own practice to enable and access such emotional athleticism. The better my ability to settle my mind and body before a rehearsal or performance, the more emotional range I am able to access and offer.

Mindfulness, like prayer, gives me pause for perspective. Perspective allows me a healthy distance from my own self-absorption so I can listen with more corporal awareness and less mental chatter. In my experience, it is this ‘stepping back’ that allows more information to not just arrive on my radar, but to register with more physical and emotional depth and clarity. By consciously adding Mindfulness to my process I am honing my ability to adjust my personal listening lens similar to that of a camera. I can pull back and get a wider audio-visual perspective or zoom in with a detailed focus, depending on what I want to listen to in a way that is surprisingly simple yet incredibly effective. Physically I am finding that when I start to listen, I am always inclined to get in my head and divorce my body to get expedient results. As a counter measure, I now find

relatively quick access to my ability to listen with resonant full-body awareness by checking in with my Alexander Technique ¹ work and making sure I am aligned, void of spinal compression and grounded in my body. I employ the imagery of energized spirals to lengthen and engage my skeletal structure and use breath to image open resonant spaces between my connecting bones. I am my own observer in these exercises. They are not unfamiliar. This is in many ways reclamation of a skill that has become complacent or distracted, but not lost. I am a very physical actor. Now, at the age of fifty, I want to broaden and deepen my physical and emotional intuition, and explore impulses with and through my older, wiser body. I believe that my research will have a positive influence on all of my personal and creative pursuits. "... I invite you to regard listening as a humanitarian act, one that influences how we love, how we live, how we learn, and how we lead." (Diggins)

Mindfulness encourages sensory simplicity and multiplicity at the same time. It necessitates being specific with all of the senses while being present and aware. This is not rocket science but it can be counter-habitual. It can feel like I am swimming solo, upstream, against the rushing force of steady stimulation. Daily practice is the key. By researching and practicing Mindfulness I am learning to listen anew. I am already habitually listening differently, with more awareness and less 'monkey mind' as the Buddhists call it, when my thoughts swing from branch-to-branch and resist a peaceful focus. I can now achieve an inner calm relatively quickly. Mindfulness is now a conscious ongoing choice that I practice instead of my previous habit of impulsive

¹ Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) created a step-by-step method of physical alignment to improve breathing, posture, and general well being, used today across all ages, cultures, and professions.

unconscious reaction. I look forward to exploring and experiencing this specific enhanced consciousness in my rehearsals and performances. “Mindfulness fosters the ability to switch between different modes of mental activity – that is, it confers flexibility of attention.” (Kaufman 80) Mindfulness practice builds almost seamlessly upon Alexander Technique, another tool already employed in my personal acting and living that establishes full-body awareness and a corporal relationship with space. Alexander Technique, like Mindfulness, helps prepare me to receive information, to truly listen, with my full body and a settled mind. Both practices are proving to be extremely helpful techniques in my newly developing process.

I was able to investigate extensive full-body listening during my spring residency at Fleming College’s Haliburton School of the Arts in Haliburton, Ontario. There I pursued three individual courses towards a graduate certificate in Expressive Arts Facilitation. To successfully facilitate an Expressive Arts experience one requires similar tools and skills for expression, storytelling, and communication as an actor. I want both my teaching of theatre and my work in Expressive Arts to foster discovery, self-esteem, and joy. In order to provide authentic experiences for participants in both of these worlds, I need deeper listening skills in order to listen intuitively to communication that is oftentimes non-verbal. The study of Expressive Arts teaches a direct path to the heart of the art of listening.

Fay Wilkinson, a Fleming College educator and owner of the Expressive Arts studio The Creative Cocoon in Eagle Lake Ontario, was emphatic that first and foremost, in order for the creative process to be free, the space in which we work must be “safe”. This means that kindness, awareness, privacy, and personal boundaries govern the sacred

workspace with zero judgment. Once safety is established, the creative self can bravely emerge. Then, through courage, curiosity and play, opportunities for self-exploration, artistic discovery and personal insight arise. Expressive Arts offers participants a journey to the self via various artistic modalities. Oftentimes the art can be a deeply personal experience. The ultimate goal however is not to make a work of art, but rather to make the art work for the individual. It was a moving experience to witness creativity surface and blossom under this virtual umbrella of safety, especially given that the safety agreement was based purely on words and trust. The most powerful ingredient of the contract for me was the participants' committed energy and willingness. There was an indescribable ethos of sacred reverence that commanded investment, compassion, and respect. Not only as a beginner Expressive Arts Facilitator, but also as an actor and teacher, I now have a fresh new understanding of what to strive for to create an exploratory space and the kind of professional and safe rehearsal environment that permits authentic work. Time was a key element. I can afford to allow more time and space, and to trust solidly in cultivating silence. More and more I find that silence, even if brief, provides a sensory reset button for me. Just like a taste of sorbet cleanses the palate during a meal, a modest serving of quiet also cleanses my busy brain and allows me to focus and be present. "What matters most is the art of being attentive to what is present in the present". (Diggins)

Silence does not have to be passive for one to experience benefits. In the silent moments I am still vibrant and energized and able to listen more clearly to my thoughts, my body and my intuition, yet none of this listening involves my ears. Gary Diggins is a rock drummer, global musician, music therapist, and co-owner of Silence, a music

therapy, and expressive arts studio. He says, “Instead of realizing the worth and wealth of interconnectivity between verbal, musical, natural, and even internal voices, students are taught to rein in their listening to the small territory of human speech.” (Diggins) I am in agreement with Diggins and attempt to engage with all the sound and vibrational elements in my environment, human speech being just one of many and not my sole focus.

Another full-body practice I now incorporate into my creative process is that of Viewpoints. Prior to pursuing my Master of Fine Arts in theatre I knew nothing of the physical and vocal techniques of this practice, which focuses primarily on our physical dialogue with others in direct relation to space. Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, in their Viewpoints book, place the act of listening as the number one imperative in the Viewpoints discipline. What I refer to as ‘full-body’ is similar to their usage of the term ‘wholeness’ in their work, and their experiences confirm my own explorations. The more I attune my body and mind, my resonator and interpreter, the more authentic my communication becomes. “Through Viewpoints we learn to listen with our entire bodies and see with a sixth sense. We receive information from levels we were not even aware existed, and begin to communicate back with equal depth.” (Landau 20) I am now using Viewpoints as an actor and teacher. It is not just a professional practice but, like Mindfulness and Alexander, it has become an integral part of my personal life. Viewpoints like tempo, repetition, shape, and spatial relationships (there are nine Viewpoints in total) have developed into a pleasant daily practice for me, with which to explore relating to others both professionally and personally.

Listening is something we frequently associate with music. We listen to music and presume our ears and auditory system are the primary functions that enable the experience. My thesis research involves the integration of a more encompassing physical exploration in listening. Neurologist and author Oliver Sacks confirms my intuitive curiosity when he writes, “Listening to music is not just auditory and emotional, it is motoric as well: “*We listen to music with our muscles*,” as Nietzsche wrote. We keep time to music, involuntarily, even if we are not consciously attending to it, and our faces and postures mirror the “narrative” of the melody, and the thoughts and feelings it provokes.” (Sacks xii) World-renowned deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie illustrates ‘muscular listening’ in a lecture for a TED Talk, whereby she plays the vibraphone with virtuosic intensity and nuance yet her ears cannot hear a note. She speaks frequently about the ability of human beings to listen with more than just our ears. Her musicality is not restricted by her disability because she is using her personal version of full-body resonant listening. She seeks out vibration in every aspect of her life to inform her relationship with her world. She *hears* through her corporal resonance. She presses the audience with this request: “Listen. *We must* use our *body* as a resonating chamber in order to hear everything there is to hear.” (Evelyn Glennie: How to Truly Listen)

I have been exploring the vibrations of virtually everything with which I now come in contact to feel firsthand how it resonates with my physical being! Pots, pans, chairs, tables, cars, kittens, drums, bells, leaves, birdsong, tea kettles, windshield wipers, and music. I have enjoyed pursuing and satisfying that curiosity. If one musician like Evelyn Glennie can access this incredible physical capacity to resonate, then how might a conductor experience and interpret full-body resonant listening with a large orchestra?

Friend and colleague Tony Gomes is a music teacher and conductor of the Toronto Wind Orchestra. He once described his experience as a conductor as inhabiting his full body with three-dimensionality. He illustrated how his arms and hands speak as propelled by his ‘hinges’ or joints, like elbows, wrists, and shoulders. He described how his body receives and responds to the music while he works to maintain quiet and focused listening. He observed that the busier his hinges, the noisier he is as a conductor, and the less he is able to listen. As an actor a similar principle applies. The noisier I am in performance, be it physically or vocally, the less I am capable of listening. In a surprising way I now appreciate the work of maestros, musicians and actors as the detailed investigative work of sound explorers.

Gary Diggins writes, “If we are to develop attention and focus, we each must exercise our ears repeatedly in a variety of circumstances.” (Diggins) For my thesis research, I am interested in exploring what I will call full-body resonant listening as it applies to both actor and character. Not just my ears will be exercised. I want to engage my full body, senses, and energy fields. Diggins goes on to say, “Instead of realizing the worth and wealth of interconnectivity between verbal, musical, natural, and even internal voices, students are taught to rein in their listening to the small territory of human speech.” When Diggins refers to internal voices it strikes a strong chord with me. Oftentimes I listen too much to my internal voices and inner critics and permit them to undermine my creativity, second guess my ideas, or judge my intuitive choices. Sometimes my listening is so acute it paralyzes me with fear instead of motivating me. My listening is a detriment in these cases. I want to engage more in listening with a healthier filter that prohibits premature self-judgment and promotes a permissive

curiosity. Diggins, also an instructor at Fleming College, loves to add ‘sound explorer’ to his resume. His book *Listening as a Mindful Practice* is to be released this year. He says, “Cultivating silence, noticing body language, hearing sub-text, catching someone’s tone of voice, attuning to the rhythm of exchanges, and developing attention techniques are rarely taken into account in communication courses.” (Diggins) I want to become attuned to the rhythm of exchanges in communication. This is a critical skill needed in the delivery of my Expressive Arts experiences. As the lead facilitator I must listen acutely to the needs, interests, abilities and energies of the participants, the timing of transitioning from mode to mode, the length of time for each investigation and experience, the tone of the room, and the experiential vibration of each person. All of these elements must flow along a creative continuum that is guided by the full-body resonant listening to each individual plus the collective emotional needs of the group.

“... Understanding, as well as truth, comes not only from the intellect but also from the body. When we begin to listen to our bodies, we begin to listen to reality through our own experiences; we begin to trust our intuition, our hearts.” (Vanier 25) When we integrate the concept of heart listening we are adding the ingredient that is the actor’s specialty, the actor’s open heart. While working with an open heart, or the possibility that my fellow players can emotionally influence me, I tap into honest unguarded emotions and courageously share them on stage.

It will be interesting to explore Peter Brook’s take on communication in his book *The Empty Space*, “A word does not start as a word – it is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behavior which dictate the need for expression.” (Brook 12) I look forward to applying full-body resonant listening to the cues and clues

given when impulse strikes in rehearsal, and in some instances before they manifest into spoken word. As Uta Hagen, legendary New York actress and teacher so aptly reminds us, “We do not hear the outer word or words, but rather what is inherent in them.” (Hagen 113) In her book *A Challenge for the Actor* she dedicates an entire chapter to the various ways that we as actors need to animate ourselves. She refers to ‘Animated Listening’ as “essential for total participation in any dialogue”. (112) But participation alone is not sufficient. Something more is required in order to make sense of what is heard and in turn use that information to motivate theatrical action. “Animated listening entails the interpretation of what is being said to us as it interacts with our own battery of psychological and mental actions ...” (114)

This engaged listening and interpretation is my artistic challenge. I aim to push through my familiar, habitual interpretive process and rediscover my more mature artist self, informed but not defined by my past artistic efforts.

I propose that by developing this process of full-body resonant listening I will deepen my ability to connect in a much more personal, truthful, and profound way. My goal is to ensure that I have a full corporal presence available to me at all times. With as much empirical objectivity as possible, I am eager to discover how this research will inform and expand my acting process and performance. With this change in my awareness I believe I will grow not just in my acting, but in my teaching and living as well.

Character and Play Research for *Oh What a Lovely War*

About the Play

Oh What a Lovely War is the satirical theatre adaptation of Charles Chilton's radio piece *It's a Long Long Trail*, written for the BBC Home Service in 1961. It was first written as a tribute to Chilton's father, a young soldier he never met, who died in the First World War. Director Joan Littlewood and the players of the Theatre Workshop Company undertook extensive historical research for the development of the stage version of *Oh What a Lovely War*. With Chilton as producer, it was first performed in 1963 at the Theatre Royal in London England and was an instant success. It is Theatre Workshop's homage to the millions upon millions of lives sacrificed during the bloody battles of The Great War.

The play intentionally lacks in sentiment and presents itself like a mash-up of variety show and carnival with cheery music, dance, and witty banter amidst the factual horrors and cruelties of battle. It is a musical revue of history, hope, fear, carnage, and ignorance. In the book *Joan Littlewood's Theatre* the show is summed up nicely, "...the show's capacity to entertain with jolly songs and exuberant wit was consistently complicated by the scalpel-like incision of facts and figures". (Holdsworth 70) To illustrate the scale of slaughter and death Littlewood had the "unfeasible statistics presented via a tickertape news panel and iconographic images projected onto a large-scale screen at the back of the stage ..." (71)

"Newspanel OCT 12

... PASSCHENDAELE ... BRITISH LOSS 13,000 MEN IN THREE HOURS

... GAIN 100 YARDS" (Joan Littlewood Theatre Workshop 2 - 83)

“Newspanel NOV 1916

... TWO AND A HALF MILLION MEN KILLED ON WESTERN FRONT” (2 – 78)

“Newspanel AVERAGE LIFE OF A MACHINE-GUNNER UNDER ATTACK ... FOUR MINUTES.” (2 – 81)

The startling death data juxtaposed with the onstage merriment made an unapologetic mockery of the magnitude of horror, sacrifice and futility of war.

By 1963 Littlewood was at the pinnacle of her career with a thirty-year history of bold, experimental, and politically controversial theatre. *Oh What a Lovely War* was her masterpiece. It was the early sixties and the cultural climate of England and the West was in direct response to the political climate. Nuclear disarmament and the Cuban Missile Crisis threatened in the West, the Korean War was less than a decade behind and the preamble to the Vietnam War had already begun. (Holdsworth) When *Oh What a Lovely War* first opened, true to Theatre Workshop’s political mandate, all theatre patrons received a sheet of anti-nuclear facts and statistics in their program.

Theatre Workshop’s inventive and satirical anti-war extravaganza was an instant and enormous success. It played London, New York and Philadelphia. It won the Grand Prix of the Théâtre des Nations in Paris and in 1964 Joan Littlewood became the first woman to receive a Tony Award nomination for Best Direction of a Musical. In 1969 well-known British actor Richard Attenborough made his cinematic directorial debut with a popular film version of the same play.

Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop

Joan Littlewood was born in 1914 and raised by working-class grandparents. Smart and creative, she excelled at school and earned her way to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), but the headstrong and outspoken Joan would not remain there

long. Her social politics were such that she could not tolerate what she felt was vacuous bourgeois work at RADA and she left for Paris with the hope of pursuing visual art studies. It quickly became apparent her passion and talent was as a theatre artist and she returned to England, taking up residence once again in Manchester. Littlewood preferred the company of men, wore masculine suits, chain-smoked, could be verbally abusive, and paid little or no attention to hairstyles or makeup. (see fig. 1) She was a militant and committed artist who was and is still frequently referred to as the mother of modern theatre.



Fig. 1. Joan Littlewood in front of the Theatre Royal

In 1934, at the age of twenty, Littlewood met communist activist Ewan MacColl. She had found her match. Together they established and ran the Theatre for Action, a precursor to Theatre Workshop. It was an experimental company with “an ideological commitment to service the working class and their political struggle, to advocate peace in the face of war and to serve the promotion of communism.” (Holdsworth 7) Littlewood and MacColl chimed creatively and politically. They developed a revolutionary creative approach to the making of theatre that was rigorous, disciplined and fearless in its

embrace of new technologies like film and radio, and in the introduction of new styles like montage, expressionism, elemental sets, and multi-level staging.

In 1936, Littlewood and MacColl regrouped and formed an ambitious new interdisciplinary company called Theatre Union. Company members lived and worked cooperatively in an orgy of creativity. Bohemian, intellectual, ardent, and passionate, the actors collectively made a commitment to theatrically illuminate the current conditions of poverty and human suffering and lived their art. Theatre Union often faced police intervention with their provocative socialist performances and was regarded as “a political irritant.” (Holdsworth 10)

In 1938 Littlewood was fired from reading poetry on air and blacklisted from BBC radio because of her communist sympathies. She was then put under security surveillance by M15 (the United Kingdom’s national security service) from 1939-1950. In 1940 during a performance of *The Last Edition*, police arrived at the theatre, stopped the show, and immediately shut the company down. Littlewood was barred from the theatre for two years ironically for breach of peace.

At this time the shadow of World War II loomed and the hand-to-mouth Theatre Union cooperative could no longer pay the bills. They disbanded as a theatre company but Littlewood hung onto her nucleus of artists. When World War II ended, it took no time at all for Littlewood and her loyal Theatre Union actors to get back into training and reform themselves as the Theatre Workshop. Over a period of eight years touring at home and abroad, Theatre Workshop earned widespread praise as a brilliantly innovative and experimental group. They further landed on the theatrical world map by being the first to

get the rights to Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* with Littlewood directing and playing the title role.

Joan Littlewood was a fierce and passionate avant-garde artist driven to serve the working class. She “dreamed of a ‘people’s theatre’ that would revolutionize British theatre and bridge ‘the gulf between creative art and the lives of ordinary people’.”

(Holdsworth 10) To be a member of Theatre Workshop was not only a career but also a lifestyle. The daily artistic discipline and subsistent communal living adhered to Littlewood’s passionate belief in what she referred to as the ‘composite mind’. (13) She firmly believed in a collective voice that like her own personal communist politics, sacrificed the self for an ideal, and relentlessly pursued the protection and empowerment of human rights.



Fig. 2. British postage stamp commemorating the life of Joan Littlewood

Character Research

Oh What a Lovely War is driven by the ensemble of players stepping in and out of various roles at rapid pace. For our production, our director has chosen to set the play in a factory of war. Everything will happen inside the factory and in full view of the audience, including costume changes. Our York Graduate production will put a more encompassing

spin on the original concept and comment on war from our modern day perspective, reflecting not just on World War I, but all wars since.

I have the opportunity to explore fourteen separate characters, almost as many dialects and a lot of music in this production. This presents an ideal working ground for my artistic challenge of deeper connectivity through full-body resonant listening. I have a veritable buffet of character opportunities and war and factory sounds with which to play and explore. Projections of war imagery throughout the play will also carry their own energy that will contribute to the resonance of each relationship and scene. Each character must have a different place of resonant connectivity influenced by the character's text, status, and dialect.

My base character is that of a factory worker (in our factory of war) and my stock Cockney soldier. I hope to be able to amalgamate my various British soldiers into one character. In this way I can develop a role with more of a through line in the piece, and have the time with the character to explore connecting with full-body resonant listening. I have a series of bouffon-style characters in Act One including General Moltke, a German military General who speaks English with an exaggerated German accent while defending the Schlieffen plan; a Serbian secret policeman, with a Serbian accent involved in the assassination of The Archduke Ferdinand; a cockney British sergeant; and the country of Switzerland. The remainder of my roles requires English in either Cockney or Received Pronunciation (RP)² and involve two or three line exchanges more as scene transition dialogue than critical story exposition. These are the roles of Henry Rawlinson,

² RP stands for Received Pronunciation which represents the Standard English Accent used in the United Kingdom

two Cockney Soldiers, a Cockney singer who takes part in a trio that sings *When Belgium Put the Kibosh on the Kaiser*, and a gossipy Englishwoman. My last role in *Oh What a Lovely War* is that of a Pierrot who speaks English with an RP accent, and text in the languages of French and German.

In the sections which follow, I will focus special attention on three of my more pronounced roles: the German soldier who sings *Stille Nacht*, notorious suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, and the bombastic gibberish-speaking British Army Drill Sergeant. I have chosen these three for extra exploration given that each have an acting trajectory and objective to accomplish versus other characters that have roles of more historical exposition and less dramatic intent.

The German Soldier and the Christmas Truce of 1914

There are many historical reports of impromptu truces that took place during that first Christmas Eve of the Great War. Opposing trenches were often within a hundred metres of each other and verbal and musical exchanges were not unknown, nor were brief truces when opposing sides could venture into No-Man's-Land to retrieve and bury their dead. This Christmas truce however was different. It is reported that the Germans initiated, and began by lighting candles on small Christmas trees and posting them on their parapets. Then they continued to celebrate the occasion with song. It is in this moment, historically and theatrically, that my character, a German soldier, sings *Stille Nacht* (Silent Night) in the profound and quiet calm of the Christmas ceasefire. I am curious to experience the silence that surrounds this moment during the play and how the song and imagery will resonate in that silence.

Emmeline Pankhurst

Emmeline Goulden Pankhurst, born 1858, was a suffragette and social activist from Lancashire, England. Married with five children, she campaigned on behalf of the poor, the uneducated, and the hungry. Most prominently and historically, Pankhurst was the militant force behind the Women's Suffrage Movement. It was largely due to her leadership that women won the right to vote and elect the people who made the very laws they were expected to obey.

Not unlike Joan Littlewood, Pankhurst was a driven organizer and sacrificed much for her beliefs. In 1903, widowed young with five teenage children, she founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), an all-women suffrage organization that became known for their confrontational demonstrations to win the vote. Pankhurst was a tireless, impatient leader who steadfastly led with proud stoicism and little emotion. She herself admitted that her natural distant disposition was well suited to activism and emotion had no place in politics. "I am very British, I fear and feel very dumb and stupid when called upon to show my personal feelings ..." (Bartley 7) She spoke sternly to the suffragettes about peaceful behaviour when arrested and never being seen as hysterical. "She was, according to a WSPU member, an idea rather than a friend, a fanatical torchbearer rather than a mother, a consummate political activist rather than a playmate." (7)

I like the paradox of Emmeline Pankhurst and look forward to exploring her portrayal in the coming rehearsal process. She patriotically put her suffrage efforts on hold while supporting the British war effort and advocated strongly for conscription by both men and women. By 1916 Pankhurst's feelings had changed. Her political circles

and extensive travel had educated her and while still strongly anti-German, she no longer could support war when talks of peace negotiations were being blindly ignored. She dramatically reversed her platform and began speaking passionately *against* the Great War. It is this anti-war speech that is portrayed in *Oh What a Lovely War*.

Her contradictory character is best summed up for me in the following two quotes:

“She championed unpopular causes, was notorious for her unorthodox politics yet was considered a ‘true lady’, genteel, softly spoken with impeccable dress sense and equally impeccable manners. At all times she maintained a professional façade of femininity while at the same time breaking every known standard of acceptable female conduct. Under her elegant exterior beat an iron determination. She may have been softly spoken but Emmeline could also be breathtakingly intransigent and obstreperous.” (Bartley 2)

The extent of her ability to gather, to inspire, to rally, and to lead with such decorum and dignified elegance is a delicious character combination for me to explore. I’m curious how I, as Pankhurst, maintain the utmost in dignity whilst instigating acts of violence?

“In the spring of 1913 a number of female political activists set fire to several country houses, burned down a grand stand at Ayr racecourse and destroyed the walls and windows of a railway station by placing a home-made bomb in it. Telephone and telegraph wires were damaged in several districts: in Oldham sixty telephone wires were cut and communication with the north of England seriously disrupted. Thin test tubes filled with phosphorus, inkbottles without corks and

corrosive acid were placed in pillar-boxes to destroy letters deposited in them.

On one occasion a mail van containing mutilated post burst into flames.

Flowerbeds were damaged, windows were broken, and the glass of thirteen famous pictures in Manchester Art Gallery was shattered. Windsor Castle was closed to the public. Emmeline Pankhurst took responsibility for this outbreak of terrorism.” (Bartley 1)

Pankhurst was repeatedly arrested and imprisoned and waged hunger strikes to draw attention to the suffrage movement. She sacrificed her health, her privacy, her freedoms, her family, and her finances in her stand against inequity.

With the idea that Emmeline Pankhurst will carry herself with restraint and control I look forward to my other character of focus, the Drill Sergeant. He carries himself in complete opposition physically, socially, and vocally in comparison to the high society activist and lady Pankhurst.

The Drill Sergeant

The nonsensical and comedic training scene in Act One of the play is led by the Drill Sergeant and is a verbatim account of a rehearsal experiment with the Theatre Workshop ensemble. With the assistance of a military advisor they began a rehearsal and realized they had nothing to use for guns, so some prop canes and umbrellas were put to use. It soon became clear how unclear military drill orders are and how often they get turned into a language built around orders but no longer understandable English. This turned the text of the Drill Sergeant into gibberish. (Joan Littlewood Theatre Workshop 18) Gibberish presents a nice challenge for me. I wish we had the time and mandate, like the Theatre Workshop did, for us to explore and play as a military group under my

tyrannical but ineffective leadership. Hopefully there will be time allowed in rehearsal for our various relationship explorations. With gibberish I will need to determine specifically what I am saying and to who while establishing words that will connect the actors and audience to my meaning.

I have not worked in gibberish before but look forward to exploring honest and ridiculous communication. When I imagine the room of actors pretending to be soldiers with canes for guns, working together in response to orders that are not remotely understandable, I immediately think of Mr. Charlie Chaplin, popular in the silent movies during the Great War.



Fig. 3. Triptych of Charlie Chaplin with cane

As a physical performer and clown I have an automatic kinship with Chaplin's physicality and open heart and it excites me to anchor my explorations with his work in mind.

In 1918 Chaplin wrote, directed and produced an anti-war silent film entitled *Shoulder Arms*, a 35-minute commentary on the Great War beginning with boot camp for the Awkward Squad and following them up to the front lines. In typical Chaplin style, he plays the hero, the new recruit number thirteen, and almost as if accidentally, he takes us on a journey both comic and tragic, ridiculous and violent, through the muddy trenches of war.

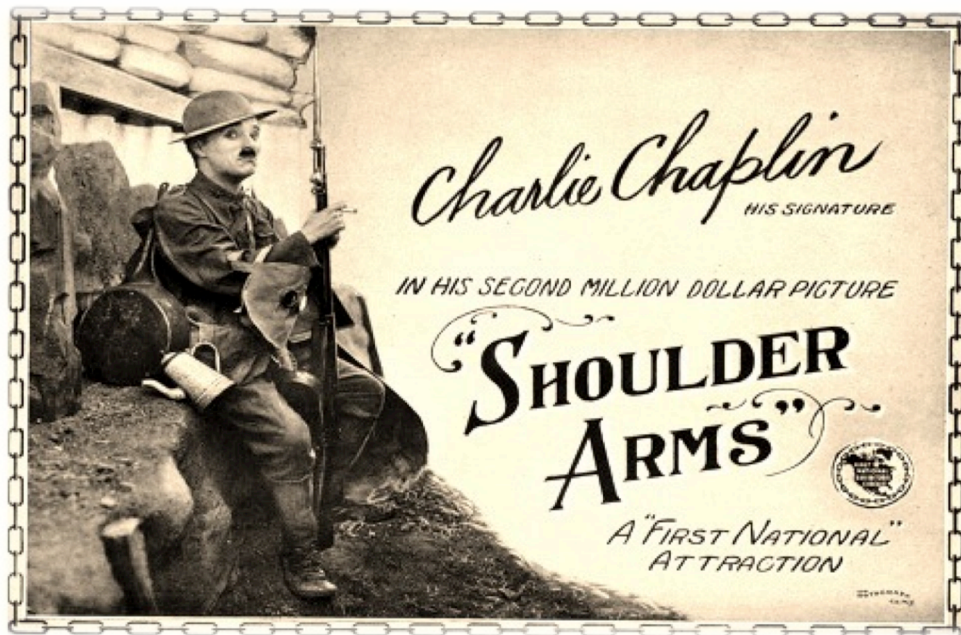


Fig. 4. A postcard promoting *Shoulder Arms* with image of Chaplin

Shoulder Arms has a remarkable similarity in its stylized presentation and blatant mockery of senseless loss to Littlewood's *Oh What a Lovely War*. Like Littlewood Chaplin balances on the tightrope of comedy above the tragic circumstances below. Although he doesn't speak, he maintains a similar British humour true to his London roots. He was eager and able to use his celebrity and artistry to fight for peace. I will use Chaplin's open heart and physical comedy to inspire my Drill Sergeant. I will also look to

his use of clown gibberish in his talkie film and his use of gibberish in his film *The Great Dictator*.

Produced in 1940, it was another extremely successful Chaplin film mocking the vulgarities and absurdities of war and its leaders. Chaplin portrayed the megalomaniacal German dictator ‘Adenoid Hynkel’, often blaming the inspiration, the real Adolf Hitler, for stealing his signature small black moustache. Fifteen minutes into the film Chaplin’s ‘Adenoid’ addresses a massive crowd with a five-minute speech spoken entirely in gibberish. It is aided with the occasional ‘translation’ by a British commentator and is a marvelous representation of gibberish, satire, and anti-war sentiment.

The Connecting Trinity of Influence

Joan Littlewood was frequently punished or banned because of Communist sympathies. She was outspoken against war and for the needs of the working class. Charlie Chaplin was also a Communist political affiliate with an extensive M15 file like Littlewood. In 1953 he flew to London for the premiere of his film *Limelight* and was banned from re-entering the United States by the then current American President J. Edgar Hoover. *He never returned.*

Emmeline Pankhurst, like Littlewood, was a forceful political activist who fought for the betterment of the working class. She brought forth and shed light on the conditions in the poorhouses and workhouses and was banished from many suffragette organizations for being too radical and unladylike. (Bartley 7) Coincidentally, as a small boy in 1894, Charlie Chaplin, his mother and sister were wards of one such workhouse at the very same time Pankhurst was advocating for more humane poorhouse conditions.

Charlie Chaplin, also an Englishman, was under contract in the United States during the First World War and thereby unable to sign up for military duty. Instead he used his artistry and celebrity to make a strong political anti-war statement with a style of satire and broad humour not unlike Littlewood's. Perhaps Littlewood was channeling a bit of Chaplin's spirit in her work. Like Pankhurst, Littlewood used her art to advocate for peace and social justice and to give voice to the needs of the working class.

In a serendipitous way Littlewood, Pankhurst and Chaplin are kindred spirits to me in their successful manifestations of their beliefs, their engagement and influence on mass audiences, and their collective abilities to affect history and stand up for peace.

Artistic Challenge Application and Rehearsal Plan

How do I employ my full-body resonant listening to achieve the deeper artistic connectivity I am searching for? With such a variety of roles it is overwhelming at this point, without being in the rehearsal room on my feet, to know if the preliminary choices I have made per character will match the intentions in the scene and the visions of our director. As a road map for my own clarity I have constructed a plan with a body point of departure for each role, knowing that part of my exploration may be the discovery that each point needs modification. For example I have chosen that the character of Serbia be led by the forehead and shoulder; the forehead will lead and always look over each shoulder with suspicion. With a style of performance that is Bouffon in nature the heightened physicality should be fun to play with.

It is counterintuitive to pre-assign physical directives before being in the actual experience to ascertain what is needed moment to moment and from where each character leads best. My research is practical and I find it challenging to give academic assignment to what is an intuitive process. I anticipate that giving focus to my listening will open up new avenues of resonance to play with that will pull me out of my habitual actor habits and into the room in a more mindful and present way. Jon Kabat-Zinn says it beautifully in his book *Full Catastrophe Living*, “We make contact with each other, and connect through all our senses, with our eyes, our ears, our noses, our tongues, our bodies and our minds. These are our doors of connection to each other and to the world. They can hold extraordinary meaning when the contact is made with awareness rather than out of habit.” (Kabat-Zinn 222) I intend to throw open my own doors of connection and

awareness to find resonance and then determine how to successfully re-create that process efficiently and repeatedly.

My list of roles in *Oh What a Lovely War* is extensive: A stock English soldier and factory worker, General Moltke, a Serbian Secret Policeman, a Drill Sergeant, a British Sergeant with the wounded, the Country of Switzerland, Henry Rawlinson, Emmeline Pankhurst, an Englishwoman, Soldier 1, Soldier 2, Pierrot Character, and the singer of two songs, *When Belgium Put the Kibosh on the Kaiser* and *Stille Nacht* (Silent Night sung in German). I have some thoughts regarding the roles that have more than just a few lines of exchange and how they might begin their development. For example, I imagine General Moltke being militaristic but bent because he is extremely near-sighted, his physical metaphor echoing his stubborn and myopic politics and ego.

Emmeline Pankhurst was the quintessential lady in style, speech and appearance but this lady also threw rocks through windows, committed acts of arson and endured hunger strikes, force feedings, and imprisonments while advocating for many an underdog. She stirred up violent protests in the name of Women's Suffrage Movement but was extremely polite and passive during arrests. An educated change of heart had her dramatically reverse her public speaking platform from one of recruitment to a louder and more passionate one of anti-war. I want Pankhurst to move from her forehead and chest together, as if the front of an imaginary helmet protects her brain and a plate of armour protects her sternum and they forge ahead of her like the fortified hull of an icebreaker.

I will incorporate my research of Charlie Chaplin into my body masks as I play with my characters and dialects. In particular I want to use Chaplin's work as my starting point for the Drill Sergeant, inspired by Chaplin's gibberish speech as the character

Adenoid Hynkel, in his talking film *The Great Dictator* (his satire of Adolf Hitler). Combined with his portrayal of Soldier #13 in his 1918 silent film *Shoulder Arms* Chaplin offers two distinct comedic war performances that establish a strong full-body connectedness to his environment.



Fig. 5. A still from Chaplin's film *Shoulder Arms*. Chaplin is wearing a tree costume using his rifles as branches.

By far the most profound product of my summer research was my personal experience of what I term 'resonant listening'. The word *resonance* has applications in music, medicine, nuclear physics, chemistry, voice, sound, energy, mechanics, electronics, astronomy, emotion, and the list goes on. For the purposes of my research as it applies to my artistic challenge of finding deeper connectivity through full-body resonant listening, I define resonance as a vibrational exchange with a neighbouring sound, object and/or energy.

Over the course of my residency at Fleming College's Haliburton School of the Arts I discovered a new point of stillness from where to begin my work. As a direct result of the practice of Mindfulness I have an exceptional tool to keep me objective and grounded in the rehearsal room, so I can maintain the artistic freedom of resonant exploration. As I integrate this practice I welcome the stillness and 'stepping back' it provides. This is a new for me. Once on my feet and on the rehearsal room floor the habitual creative approach to character begins in my brain then flows quickly and easily to my body and likes to get busy. Given that I have such an array of characters in this play, it will serve me well to work on my new process of preparation to ensure I am not mentally racing ahead of myself. Instead I want to be landing solidly in the present from moment to moment.

My new process makes extensive use of discoveries made during my spring residency at the Haliburton School of the Arts. It was there that I experienced profound corporal full-body resonance after being led through a soundscape designed as a farewell project especially for me. That deeply moving soundscape has awakened my awareness to the depth of influence sound can have on my body and how to chime with sounds that are pleasant, and remain porous to sounds that are not. My pre-rehearsal or pre-performance warm-up is grounded in Mindfulness first and foremost. I have found nothing more powerful over the years that can draw me into the present moment so efficiently and effortlessly. My immediate approach is logging three senses: for example three sounds, three touch senses and three smells. And then I breathe. I breathe and simply observe my breath as I draw myself into the present moment and my immediate surroundings.

“Mindfulness is cultivated by assuming the stance of an impartial witness to your own experience.” (Kabat-Zinn 33) When I read Jon Kabat-Zinn’s book *Wherever You Go There You Are* the notion of Mindful breathing struck a strong chord. “Mindfulness of breathing is one string on which the beads of our experience, our thoughts, our feelings, our emotions, our perceptions, our impulses, our understanding, our very consciousness can be threaded.” (Kabat-Zinn 215) This idea of threading together one’s psychological, sensual, social, and physical states is exactly the work of an actor.

From my physical and mental state of being present, I hope to gain simplicity and a mindful calm during *Oh What a Lovely War* to relieve the pressures of fast-paced turnarounds from character to character and scene to scene. I am eager to explore the process of accessibility and connectivity. All of the transitions of scenes, costumes, and characters take place onstage in front of the audience. The more efficient I can make the path to each role, the better chance I have of achieving a centered place of porous receptivity to bring to the next part I play in the production. The key will be mapping the best course of action during rehearsals and keeping track of all fourteen individual explorations and the different processes that hook up my resonant listening.

I am looking forward to consciously using Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s composition technique of Viewpoints in the rehearsal process. Just as Mindfulness provides a healthy emotional perspective, Viewpoints offers a visual perspective and guidelines to explore my physical relationship to others and the playing space. It should be an interesting exercise to play with topography, gesture, repetition, tempo, and kinesthetic response. These five Viewpoints can be incorporated quietly and continuously without having them imposed on others. In practicing both Mindfulness and Viewpoints

work on a daily basis it is becoming more than just my theatre process. It is a way to settle my mind, calm my breathing and ground my physical body on a daily basis and sometimes moment to moment.

On the set of our production of *Oh What a Lovely War* a giant cogged wheel that generates power looms at one end of our set. The stage is slightly raised and the audience sits on either side of the long and narrow platform. Ironically this visual connects me back once more to Charlie Chaplin. This time I imagine him in his 1936 film *Modern Times*, where Chaplin gets caught in and subsequently wound through the gears of a giant machine he is attempting to fix. The similarity with our set and cogged wheel is uncanny. Chaplin was interviewed about the movie and this famous quote came about. Given the play's topic of war and my personal work on Mindfulness, it seems the perfect closing:

“More than machinery, we need humanity” Charlie Chaplin



Fig. 6. A still from Chaplin's film *Modern Times* matching the industrial tone and factory cog similar to *Oh What a Lovely War*

Selected Journal Entries

November 12th, 2014

First rehearsal discussion today was about our stock roles as factory workers in this Fun Palace Factory. We are fearful and captive and told to *cast our audience*, as we will have direct interaction with them on multiple occasions throughout the play.

Since we allegedly remain in the playing space for the duration of the play I hope we get a chance to explore our relationships with one another as our stock characters so we can build upon these. I would like to establish who I am physically so I know better how to transform into my other characters. We will not be getting costume sketches or set design drawings or models for at least another week. There are no reference materials in the room to start our common journey so I am hopeful we can discuss it in detail soon so we have a communal launching point.

Looks like playing corridor style will provide some juicy opportunities for Viewpoints exploration. I would be cheating myself of the real research work if I were to stay reserved/safe in my investigations. I need to play incrementally with the curiosity of an open heart in tandem with cautiously protecting this valuable asset.

Intention must lead the dialect work. The playing space is open with hard surfaces and the sound will be very bouncy. Investigating today focusing on four body parts and vocal sound. The advantage of playing in the round is the constant demand for a 360 degree awareness of resonance. I have assigned qualities to each part in order to add or subtract them as they assist or detract from the intention of my text: the head is strong, inquisitive and a driving energy; the ribcase represents power, a largess that is overbearing and bossy; the belly supports confidence, open and maternal energy; while

its close neighbor the pelvis holds trickster energy and the calculated liquid or fluid motion of a hunting cat.

November 15th, 2014

Today marked our first music rehearsal. The energy of the group feels nervous and silly. We are told there will be no instruments in the show outside of the human voice. The learning of all the trench songs is done without notated music alongside a strumming guitar with assurance that 'close enough' to the melody is just fine. This makes me feel like the twitchy inspector in the Peter Sellers' Pink Panther movies. This approach does not inspire confidence and this is notably an area where cast members are feeling insecure and worried. I would prefer to know exactly what I am singing musically and lyrically and *then choose* to sing it sloppily or off-key.

I stay mindful of maintaining resonance in the bones of my face, breathing into an open channel both front and back, and keeping my tongue and jaw hinge relaxed. I try and open and release my body in order to engage in my exploratory listening. I feel rigid.

I focus on keeping my vocal channel engaged both front and back, exploring resonance with the bones and spaces of my human mask. I observe that the space behind my tongue tightens when there is a lack of focus in the room and work on the steady checking in and releasing of that space.

November 18th, 2014

I remember that sung music is a sustained tone with an emotional need.

Have chosen to work with the image of a castrated kangaroo for the Drill Sergeant. In my imagination he has had his balls metaphorically cut off by the Master of Ceremonies (MC) making him vocally clenched and effectually impotent. To help avoid

actual vocal strain I integrate the image of a long muscular tail of the kangaroo into my Alexander Technique. By lengthening physically and imagistically, both front and back, and assuming a massive tail to support my bullying swagger, I can send vocal energy in opposing directions and steer away from the clenching of my throat and tongue.

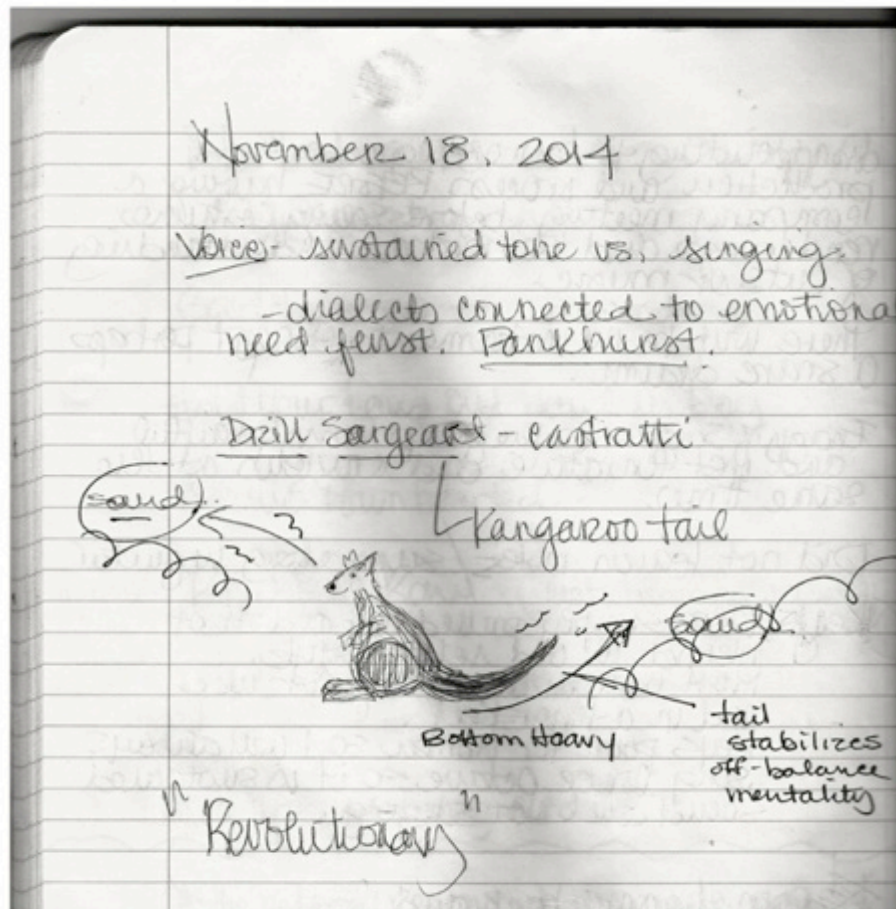


Fig. 7. Sketch from my rehearsal journal with image of Kangaroo and spiral energy of Alexander Technique

Company meeting was tonight. We finally got to see the work of the design teams!

So good to see the whole team and their work.

November 21st, 2014

Music rehearsal today was once again rather unsettling. Instead of learning right intervals and lyrics, we are encouraged to 'sort of know it'. I can see this makes most of the ensemble frustrated. Not sure why we need to settle on doing something 'sort of' when we can *act* tentative if necessary.

Since our first reading I have had my cajon in the room. This is a square wooden box that one can sit upon and play, using all sides of the box. I made it from a kit. One side has an open hole, similar to the open hole of a guitar and inside is a snare, giving the different sides of the box individual resonance and sound. Tonight I play it more than I sing. I want to experience the voices in the room without my own, and help maintain a beat while songs are being learned. It is an extremely grounding exercise to sit on the cajon and feel the resonance of the snare within.



Fig. 8. The Cajon

This mindful focus keeps me sane amidst what feels like sloppy music acquisition.

I offer up my first full version of “Stille Nacht”, having learned the German before rehearsals began, and feel confident it will land theatrically in the context of the show. I can already feel the comfort of this song and the safety surrounding it.

December 3rd, 2014

We asked again to establish relationships with each other as factory workers, clarify our relationships to the MC and audience, and develop the rules and regulations of the factory. There has been no room for organic contribution, clarification or ensemble building. Request is ignored.

Tracking my traffic pattern, prop and costume presets, and character transformations today. So far six of my characters have been cut from the play. Embracing change is my top priority for my Mindfulness practice. The crazy amount of daily changes and confusing information has become an undermining hurdle for the cast.

Pankhurst’s entrance has been moved from Act 1 to Act 11. She now stands alone. Out of all the workers in the factory she represents the only outside threat to the MC. As Emmeline my weapon for peace is my freedom and my words. I hold power in my stillness and feel a safety that allows my sense of porous resonance to exist without muscling it. I remember the words of Dr. Ian Ellis and keep an “awareness of awareness and attention to intention”. This is enormously helpful.

December 8th, 2014

I am confused and struggling to find the connections and flow of the play. Nonsense prevails in the room. I have requested to look at the Drill Sergeant scene, which is always being skipped over, so I can understand how to proceed with working on

my gibberish -- What am I really saying? Why am I speaking gibberish? To what degree do the other soldiers fear or obey me? Etc. Have been assured we will get to it. Thus far I improvise during runs without context, props, or drills. There is no sense of play with the others. This does not feel good. I would also like to set and practice the fight that allegedly happens between my Serbia character and Soo's Austro-Hungarian. No fight rehearsals have been planned. We wait.

December 13th, 2014

The company needs a rest. I need vocal rest. I love singing Stille Nacht. It is a beautiful piece of music. It requires no one else but me listening to the room listening to me. During the Christmas truce we join together in the speaking of the 23rd Psalm. I make sure to bury myself in the group and absorb the experience. It is another safe resting place where I can profoundly connect via my listening, to the full resonant experience in the room.

December 18th, 2014

As of today my understanding of my artistic challenge, full-body resonant listening goes something like this: My senses are already pretty well tuned. The tuning is not the problem—the challenge lies in the reception of the resonance. I feel it gets trapped. I don't allow the energy to move on. When I harbour it in my body I am distracted by it. Something prevents its release. Maybe it is the intellectual interpretation rather than simply experiencing it without judgment, in other words, more mindfully.

January 7th, 2015

Rehearsal was on deck today. The pulley systems that deliver various props are now functional, the scaffolding is up and half the risers and the giant cogged wheel have

been installed. I feel like I am not able to address my artist challenge of connection very much as we have yet to do much scene/text/relationship/dialogue work yet. Full-body listening comes easily and intuitively during the musical pieces. So far it is the only time that all of us work together and listen, chime and connect with one another. Harmonizing is the icing on the cake as it lends another element of connecting and relating that I really enjoy.

Now that we are on stage in our heavy army boots we have to fight harder to connect against the echo and thudding on the hollow wooded deck. This is actually forces listening!

January 9th, 2015

Best day so far! Rehearsal today was with Sam our musical director. We stayed on task and worked to achieve specificity with each song. Fantastic. Today was 100% about the work. The day was structured, progressive and detailed. I brought in sketches of the Drill Sergeant scene to offer and they were embraced with enthusiasm.

The Serbia and Austro-Hungarian scene has still not been addressed with any detail. During the staging of something else, Soo, Curtis and I took ourselves away to work on it. We played, stopped when we were confused, asked questions, shared discoveries, and in the space of half an hour had arrived at clarity, connection and clear historical exposition and relationship. We explored varying degrees of our animal bodies and allowed them to inform our reactions. I invited my colleagues to play with Viewpoints work. This gave us a clear starting point. We established a much smaller playing space on the stage and used it to its maximum potential. We found all twelve guideposts that Michael Shurtleff articulates in his book *Audition* and ample opportunity

to use Viewpoints: topography, gesture, kinesthetic response, spatial relationship, and tempo. It was palpable that all three of us were engaging in full-body listening with one another. It was satisfying and really enjoyable to work collaboratively with such a willingness to connect. We came back and presented the finished product in the room for the director. The fight was cut and our version of the scene replaced it. Whew.

January 10th, 2015

We worked the Drill Sergeant scene with more specifics today in the rehearsal hall. Director not present so lots accomplished with specificity. We worked collaboratively. We needed that. Props and costume will not happen until we are back on stage.

January 13th, 2015

Mindful. My approach today was a mindful personal investigation. With conscious renewing I was able to stay present and available. Discovery! The Drill Sergeant is the court jester for the MC. The fool. His body is my homage to Chaplin in style and spirit. He is less vulnerable and more fearful.

January 23rd, 2015

I believe that tonight we finally hit our stride in terms of a cohesive company that is relaxed and connected enough to own the show in our own right. We are breathing and relaxing more and actually and finally enjoying the performances. I feel open and relaxed. I am at ease and it's been a long road to get here in terms of the process. I am experiencing the resonant reception in a visceral and three-dimensional calm.

It is interesting to me that I find it 'safer' to explore creatively when an audience is present. Assistants and crew don't count. They are too familiar. I have a powerful need to be truthful and playful and 100% connected.

What is most surprising is that while exploring my full-body resonant listening to find deeper connectivity, the connections I have made have not really been with people, but rather my own creative voice. And it feels good. It has rocked the boat on more than one occasion and I have had to pioneer a new approach to my own work, which I believe will prove beneficial.

January 14th, 2015

Detachment and connection can exist simultaneously. Who knew?

January 20th, 2015: Opening Night

The morale of the company is much better tonight. We have bounced back from losing a company member essentially at the five-minute call last night. The audience tonight felt super supportive and not the regular 'show me' crowd. This felt really good. I felt comfortable and free. This was an excellent place from which to keep renewing my full-body resonant state of listening. I really appreciated the intuitive way my body accesses the Alexander work I have practiced for so long and keeps me present in my body. The character of Moltke tonight was so controlled and bent over, but I felt relaxed within the contorted body mask and capable of sustaining it without strain. This was play at its best!

January 23rd, 2015

I find I really look forward to the times that I go into the audience in the show. I like to make the connection, but indirectly. I don't demand participation but like to exist

amongst them in a common world. I especially look forward to the Christmas truce. I am drawn to the moment of truth I can portray as an actor. I have to say I really enjoy being silent onstage. Just existing in character feels honest. Crazy sounding.

This evening had a great *connection*. At the top of the truce scene I crawled into the bleachers and huddled down as my German soldier trying to keep warm in the snow. A nice big shoulder looked very inviting so I moved closer and cuddled up to the gentleman's arm. Immediately the arm lifted, wrapped around my shoulder and pulled me in! It was fabulous. The next challenge was justifying leaving something so warm and comforting. I felt the impulse to pull out my leather book and find the photo of my family. I decided instead to give it some levity and moved away from the kind audience member as if he were rather smelly. I heard a deep chuckle and looked up to find the gentleman was Emilio, a graduate from last year. A lovely surprise all round. Then I sang "Stille Nacht", perhaps my favourite part of the play because of its heart and simplicity.

My leather book: I made this book. I cut the leather, tore the pages and sewed it together. There are personal entries for each character I portray. It holds my world of war.



Fig. 9. My handmade leather book with personal entries for each character



Fig. 10. Side view showing stitching and weathered pages



Fig. 11. Interior view showing ancestral German family name and a photo used during the singing of *Stille Nacht*

January 26th, 2015

Oh What a Lovely War is over. We performed our final matinée the day before yesterday. My body is bruised and aching and my throat very fatigued. In spite of many

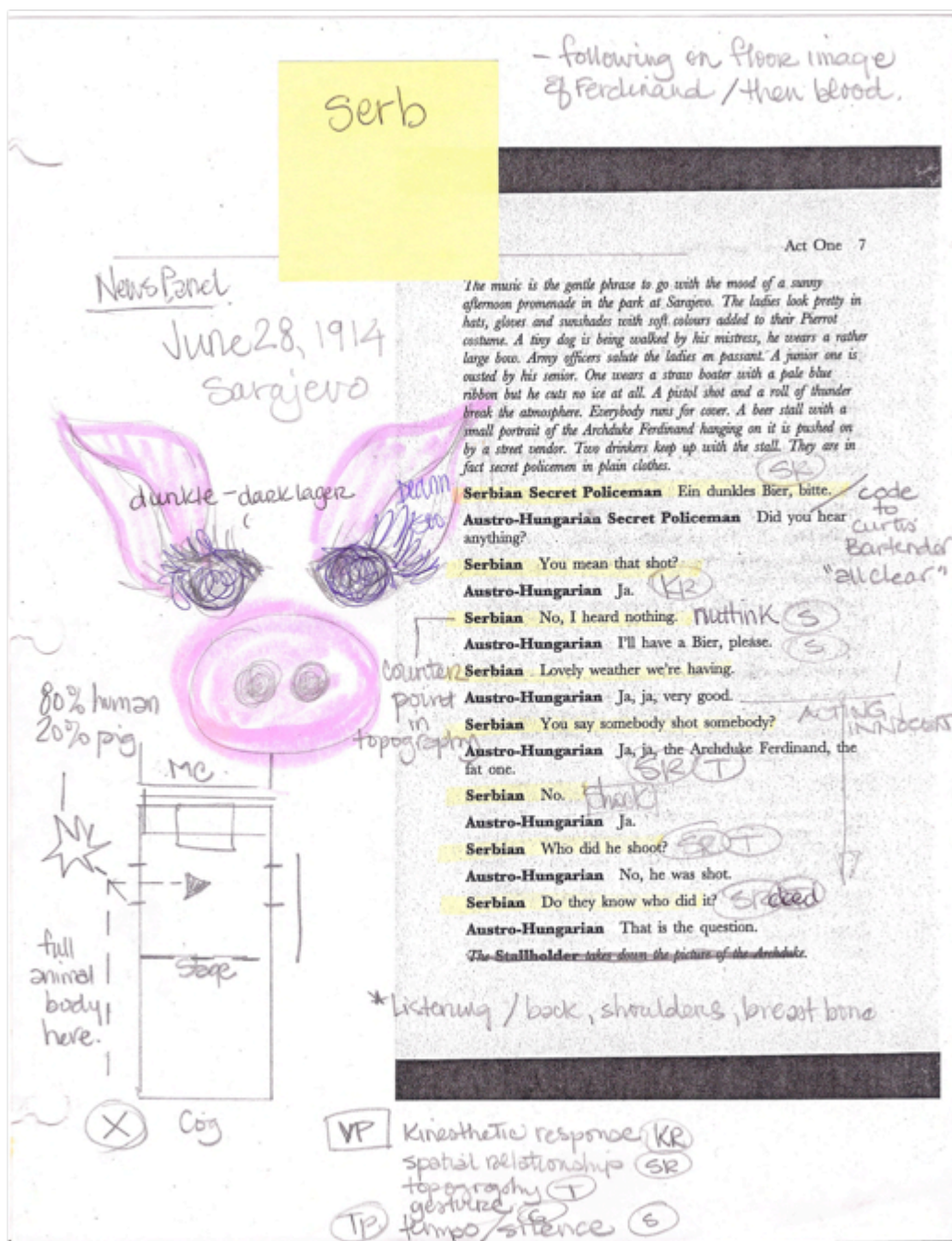
obstacles along the way I do feel a sense of accomplishment. In fact after some rest, I could easily perform this for another week to explore more. There is a reason Actors' Equity demands a day off – sheer physical exhaustion. This space has been challenging vocally and we are feeling the effects of nine shows in a row without rest.

I especially felt the fatigue with Pankhurst on the final evening. I chose not to push but to relax and open up my new porous state to the max. When I did this I was open to the exchange of information and felt available.

I wish I had had more time with the Drill Sergeant. Because the scene was devised at the last minute and props and costumes only arrived for the first preview, I feel I could have found more rapport with the MC and my sidekicks, and that parts were rushed. I found Moltke, Serbia and my German soldier the most satisfying to portray because they were the most specific.

I enjoyed sharing time and space with the old trench songs of the early 1900's and from a historical perspective I am much more knowledgeable now. I appreciated learning about the Great War and Joan Littlewood's dedication to anti-war politics and the theatre.

Selected Script Sample



Historical clarification ① then in comes Kaiser Willie/Austria *Keep in physical opposition to Soc
 ② in comes Russia to help Serbia
 ③ and in comes France because they hated Germany since 1871.

*France unhappy since Germany was established.

8 Oh What a Lovely War

He was driving a motor car. KR SK T

Serbian Very dangerous things, motor cars. warn.

Austro-Hungarian With the Archduchess.

Serbian Big fat Sophie. Mock opportunity for Pigs meeting

The Austro-Hungarian starts taking notes.

Austro-Hungarian Ja, big fat Sophie. With a revolver. KR revolver stops my pleasure.

Serbian Should have used a pistol. A Browning enlighten
 automatic. With a Browning automatic you can shoot twenty archdukes. A/H Beginning Automatic:

Austro-Hungarian Do you know who did it? (To Stallholder)

Stallholder Do you know who did it?

Stallholder No. I never meddle in politics.

Austro-Hungarian Then what have you done with the Archduke Ferdinand's portrait?

Stallholder I had to take it down. The flies shit all over it. Deflect

Serbian I will tell you exactly who did it. Post turn the energy to war.

Austro-Hungarian Yes?

Serbian It was either a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, or a Serb, or a Croat, or a young Czech Liberal, or an Anarchist, or a Syndicalist. In any case it means war.

Austro-Hungarian You think so?

Serbian Of course. 'Bongl,' says Austria. 'Shoot my nephew, would you? There's one in the schnackers for you.' Then in comes Kaiser Willie to help Austria, in comes Russia to help Serbia, and in comes France because they hated Germany since 1871.

Austro-Hungarian (writing on a pad) '... because they hated Germany since 1871.' Very good, thank you. Would you sign this please? DELIGHT

Serbian (signing) This war has been coming for a long time. Franz Ferdinand had it coming

only using half stage 360° clarification of story point

VIEWPOINTS * Keep in physical opposition to Soc

① Kaiser Willie - Austria

② Russia Serbia

③ France - Germany since 1871

Double message: TACTIC: illustrate while chastising

100% pig/surprise.

CRJSC Crot. en. Syd.

Eastern Europe do not use articles.

make super clear!

HISTORY EXPOSITION

make it clear how it all begin + who aligned w. who?

relish in this moment! AT LAST.

Pig speak: He might squeal on me!

POISED + READY.

opportunity for FB/listening/HIGH ALERT

360° awareness / I could be implicated here /

DISCOVERY!
A MEMBER OF
THE "SERPENT"
CLUB.

Drinking
beer in
mirror
image.

gesture/mirror image
Act One 9

Austro-Hungarian Ja, I am glad you think so. Step out on to the pavement. I am a member of the Austro-Hungarian Secret Police.

Serbian And I am(a) member of the Serbian Secret Police.

Austro-Hungarian Ah! We liquidated you yesterday - I arrest you for high treason.

Serbian What about him?

Austro-Hungarian Good idea. We arrest you.

Stallholder But I've said nothing!

Austro-Hungarian You said the flies could schreier on the Kaiser. Left, right, left, right ... (As they move off.)

Serbian This means war.

Band ~~Over the wall~~ *charge into Moltke*

All three go off. The music is fast and excited. People's hearts are beating. Two Newsboys run across the stage.

First Newsboy Special! Austria declares war on Serbia!

Second Newsboy Extra! Russia mobilises! Russia mobilises!

Two Girls cross the stage pushing a tandem bicycle.

First Girl Russia mobilises?

Second Girl Ja, and Papa says France must stand by Russia.

First Girl Oh! Is that good?

Two German Businessmen pass with bowler hats and dispatch-cases.

First Businessman I understand that we have ordered Russia to demobilise within twelve hours. The point is, will France remain neutral?

gesture/mirror image
Act One 9

charge into Moltke

Exit DSR

remove pig hat

travel UK into Moltke

the wheels are already in motion

Conclusion

I can say with confidence that our Theatre@York production of Joan Littlewood's *Oh What a Lovely War* proved a fertile ground for the artistic development of my full-body resonant listening and acting process in various and unexpected ways. Initially when rehearsal began, I brought my historical information and my plans to apply my thesis research to my process as I began to analyze and interpret my script. We were up on our feet quickly and I was eager to apply and test out different ways to access my full-body resonant listening. This took place in a very visceral and open exchange with objects, people and sound. It soon became evident that attempting to stay receptive to so much all at once, without a more incremental approach, resulted very quickly in sensory overload. The result was the opposite of my goal. Instead of accessing tangible connections to other actors in my immediate space, I had to retreat in order to manage the sheer volume of information my new awareness was allowing me to experience. It was as if the onslaught of resonance proved too large. To avoid being overwhelmed, I would find myself physically stiffening and tensing as if to stand *against* the energy instead of working *with* the energy.

I needed to work with imagery to soften my three-dimensionality and its receptiveness and make myself more pliable. Instead of deflecting the energies of resonant listening, I needed to be able to respond, and after that exchange, to let it move on. I began playing with new imagery and a physical sense of having vibrational exchanges flow *through* me. It gave me a window of intrigue into the healing power of musical vibrations. This was the key to staying present and relaxed, especially in rehearsals, where there was a steady stream of noise and confusion. It was a challenging

environment to work in and I was grateful to actively apply the research of this new process.

I established that my investigation demanded smaller and more specific targets. For example, instead of singing musical intervals and lyrics, and listening with 360 degrees of full-body engagement to the song story, the music of the song, the harmony, and the stillness resonating around me, I needed to focus on one aspect only. To attempt any more this early on was premature. I wanted to connect with the words, which I could do in my private practice. When satisfied, I could then add music, followed by the resonance of my own voice, and let that percolate and chime in my personal version of surround sound. I found I could be significantly more successful at finding the physical state that best allowed full-body resonant listening when I examined it in much smaller doses. It required, in some cases, the breaking down of an experience into very small sections that I could then reassemble. In accessing this new corporal sound repeatedly, it was not long before I was able to achieve it quite efficiently. This enabled me to begin building the amount of stimulation I could receive and manage in this sensual experiment.

The work of uncovering and interpreting a scene, song or dance is familiar to me. I am comfortable incorporating sections, beats, measures, steps, sequences, intervals, intentions, relationships, and so on, but I have never investigated the way I listen to these individual components or combinations and the way they can resonate and impact me. In *Oh What a Lovely War*, the beginning of the piece gave me a simple and clear opportunity to research exactly that.

The ensemble entered from the coat check in the loading dock and we marched into the black box theatre as one chorus. This required the attunement of all of our bodies to move together with military precision, executing turns, stops, and steps as we sang and arrived onstage. The audience sat in raised bleachers on either side of us. The soundscape of an old mechanical factory clanged loudly, the audience shuffled and whispered, and our boots pounded loudly on the hollow deck while a hazer puffed fog in front of projections on the south wall. I could successfully arrive in the space with the physical knowledge that I was connected on a resonant frequency and experiencing full-body listening. I found myself feeling profoundly aware of being aware. It was very satisfying.

Our rather technical entrance at the top of the show proved to be a hugely helpful stepping stone. It bridged my pre-show listening state gradually with that of the performance world. My ambient, resonant radar could adapt to all of the new elements incrementally and steadily. I think this really helped to consciously acknowledge and absorb all of the contributing components and not let them overload me. It was this conscious observation that initiated my thoughts on the physical sensation of being porous. I liked the idea that full-body resonant listening could receive, interpret and *release*. I had not previously considered the act of releasing as important, but I understand and appreciate it now to be a critical part of my process. Resonance can engage me, chime with me, and then flow through me. I use the image of a giant bell that rings out its vibration from the clapper, or a sea sponge that sways with the tide while allowing water to pass through itself. This is the foundation I knew I had to build upon. It is a combination of the thoughtful observation used in Mindfulness and the continuous

expanding and releasing body-work of Alexander Technique, all rolled into one. It demands deep and centered breathing.

This porous state-of-being felt freeing and calming, and deepened with the presence of an audience. It was a very new sensation however and I found that it necessitated constant renewal. I liked the fact that I had to remain attentive to my awareness in a cyclical set of checks and re-checks. The habits of old regularly wanted to pull me back to a place of tension or blockage. On some days it seemed effortless, while others were spent attempting to renew and source that porous image time and again, with sporadic success.

My biggest surprise came with the discovery that my full-body resonant listening felt most successful when we had an audience present. Perhaps it was because they were the missing players? In this production especially we had many scenes whereby we were in the audience and involving them directly in our stories. One of the key elements for my truthful artistic exploration, confirmed in my residency in my Expressive Arts course over the summer months, is that of having a place of safety in which to explore and play. I felt safest with an audience. I knew it to be a time when the ensemble was forced to extend themselves to perform honestly and connect our story to others who had not heard it before. In this regard it demanded an honest presence that was not demonstrated fully in rehearsals.

In the chapter on my artistic challenge application and rehearsal plan, I articulated three roles out of a potential fourteen that would be my primary focuses in *Oh What a Lovely War*. The first was Emmeline Pankhurst. Originally the Pankhurst scene was played with me trying to win over the zealots who cried for war, and steer them in favour

of peace. There were shouts and jeers and interjections battering Pankhurst's speech and I knew I would really have to listen while trying to achieve my objective of informing the factory workers of critical, life-changing information that was being kept hidden from them. I was really driven to connect with the ensemble and determined that my full-body resonant listening was going to make those connections happen. Then the exchanges with the crowd were removed and it became a speech to the Master of Ceremonies sitting high in her scaffold factory office, with the audience and my fellow players listening curiously in the darkened corners. The imagery of the bell wouldn't work. There was very little actually being sent out to me. I needed to extend myself to get to all of them. The sponge image also felt useless. I entered the space from a ladder behind the risers following a scene that was measured and gruesome. I knew I had to stir things up. Emmeline Pankhurst was an aggressive and outspoken activist but always described as impeccable and lady-like. I wanted her to glide and hover. An idea came to me: an octopus! I could envelop both audience and ensemble with my elegant octopus arms of persuasion. I would connect by commanding their involvement with my energy and text. I felt that early on in previews I had the energy to vocally extend but felt lacking in my argument. By the end of the ninth show, I felt the reverse had taken place. I was vocally very tired but had a much clearer sense of what I was saying. This came via the simple technique of allowing pauses for information to land and the audience to catch up. The pauses did not slow down the driving need of Pankhurst to be heard.

The second focal role was the Drill Sergeant This was a part of our rehearsal process that was largely unrehearsed, with most props being introduced during our first preview. As a result my physical work was done privately until props and audience

arrived, and an overview of the scene was essentially honed between the first preview and closing. I aided myself in the use of gibberish by adding in a set of prosthetic teeth that made my mouth more pronounced and the extreme use of vowels more fun to play. It conveniently focused my place of resonance in my facial mask, helping me send the gibberish out and up in the playing space. As the gibberish comically sabotaged the success of the drill exercises in the scene, my goal was to connect with the intention of what I was saying. Keeping the physicality of Charlie Chaplin as my starting place, I played the Drill Sergeant with width in space and a slight rock from side-to-side. The vulnerability of Chaplin had to be swapped for the bombastic ridicule of the Sergeant. It was a fair trade.

The third role on which I focused was the German soldier who sang “Stille Nacht”. This was an interesting exercise and wonderful personal exploration in listening and connecting. The scene portrayed the famous Christmas truce initiated by the Germans on Christmas Eve 1914. Those of us playing Germans sat on the floor or in the bleachers, across the stage from the seated actors playing the British on their side, all of us shivering to stay warm while some of our undergraduate cast mates sprinkled snow throughout the space. I was huddled around the top steps of the risers among the feet of the audience in the top row. If opportunity presented itself I would huddle with an audience member. As an Expressive Arts’ exercise to connect me to the play, I had made a notebook for my stock factory worker character to carry in my overalls. I cut the leather, tore and distressed the paper, sewed the book, and inscribed it with my ancestral German surname. In it I kept a record of all of my characters in the play, a needle and thread, poetry, and sometimes character notes on events, weather reports, or sketches of

fellow soldiers. I also kept a period photograph of a family – my German family in the play. Inspired by his family tradition in church back home in Stuttgart, my German soldier sang “Stille Nacht” to his children’s picture and kissed them goodnight.

Following the song there was an arresting moment of complete stillness that resonated very deeply each performance. It was so full. I could sit in that kind of held silence for a long time. I found it meditative and peaceful, connected and fully dimensional. I like to believe that we all experienced a connection borne from full-body resonant listening and were given a moment to consciously and collectively experience it.

I recognize that the kind of connecting I was planning on during this production was one of a deeper personal alliance with fellow actors and characters. This play (and the culture of development and rehearsal) did not lend itself to personal connections of that sort whatsoever. Because the play was highly stylized, and the scenes and sequences changed a dozen times during rehearsal, my deepest connections were not made with other people. Much to my surprise, the deepest connecting I did throughout the exploration of my full-body resonant listening was with my own creative voice.

Through the daily discipline of a new artistic practice, I feel I am much more connected with my own creative process. A significant element of full-body resonant listening involved identifying and capitalizing on the fleeting moments of stillness, both of mind and body. I feel I have a new methodology that I trust to inform my work as an actor and teacher. I have a growing confidence in my own artistry as I learn to articulate it with more clarity, instead of apologizing for it. In this work I have experienced the exchanges that lie within connections to the immediate world around me. It gives me confidence in my physical impulses and talent as an actor. I trust that this discovered

listening technique will keep developing and evolving for me. I would like to continue to explore the hybrid of Mindfulness and Alexander Technique, inspired by the discipline of Viewpoints articulated by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. I would like this exploration to carry me forward in my acting, teaching and Expressive Arts facilitation in the coming years.

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